

In the Bazaar of Love
The Selected Poetry of
Amīr Khusrau

Translated and introduced by
Paul E. Losensky and Sunil Sharma



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Losensky, has patiently endured all the drafts of the translations and provided enthusiastic love and support throughout.

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INTRODUCTION

Amīr Khusrau (1253–1325)—often also written as Khusraw or Khusro—was one of the greatest poets of medieval India, writing in both Persian, the courtly language of Muslims of the sultanate period, and Hindavi, the vernacular language of the Delhi area. Known as *Tūtī-yi Hind* (Parrot of India) for his poetic eloquence and fluency in Persian, Amīr Khusrau has stood as a major cultural icon in the history of Indian civilization for almost seven hundred years. He is especially remembered as the founder of the 'Ganga-Jamni' Hindustani culture which is a synthesis of Muslim and Hindu elements. He helped to give a distinctive character to Indian Islamic cultural traditions through his contributions to the fields of Indian classical music, Islamic mysticism (Sufism), South Asian Sufi music (*qawwālī*), and Persian literature. Significantly, he also contributed to the development of Hindavi, in which both modern Hindi and Urdu have their roots. Positioned at the juncture of two cultures, Amīr Khusrau's prodigious talents and prolific literary output make him one of the outstanding figures in Islamic, Indian, and indeed world cultural history.

Amīr Khusrau's legacy is far more widespread than people realize, from his vast corpus of Persian poetry that continues to be read in the modern Persian-speaking world (Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan) to this day, to the devotional *qawwālīs* that are performed and listened to in India, Pakistan, and beyond. He is

rightly acknowledged as the best Indian poet to have written in Persian, and his influence on later Persian and Urdu literature was immense. In South Asia, he is revered for his contributions to music and mysticism but most people are familiar with only a small portion of his immense body of poetry and prose in Persian, or have no access to these works due to the language barrier. This has not been Amīr Khusrau's fate alone. The Persianate world in which he lived, the entire area from Anatolia (now Turkey) to India, no longer exists as a cultural continuum. Though the ruling elite of these lands was mainly Turkish by ethnicity, the language of high culture was Persian, with Arabic serving as the sacred language of religion. But Persian ceased to be a language of learning in the Indian subcontinent during the British colonial period, and with the fragmentation of the Persianate world by the forces of modern nationalism, many poets who form part of the Indian Persian heritage have suffered a similar fate, including the nineteenth-century Ghālib, who wrote prodigiously in Persian as well as in Urdu. However, Amīr Khusrau's Hindavi poetry and Persian poetry on Sufi themes are still part of a living and dynamic tradition.

Amīr Khusrau's personality is shrouded in mystery and attempts to piece together his biography can be frustrating. Modern biographers have difficulty resolving the apparent conflict between his professional life as a courtier and his spiritual life as a mystic. As a courtier Khusrau would have had to overlook many morally dubious actions and practices on the part of his patrons, for which he must have suffered some ethical conflict. Furthermore, while tradition credits Khusrau with a body of Hindavi poetry and the invention of several musical instruments, there is no written, documentary evidence to support this claim. Fortunately for us, there is quite a bit of biographical information in Amīr Khusrau's own writings and in numerous poetic and Sufi biographical narratives from throughout the medieval period. Although the information is not always reliable and the resulting picture of the

poet seems one-dimensional or larger than life, it is more than we have for most other pre-modern poets. Getting to the 'real' Amīr Khusrau challenges us to sort through an overwhelming number and variety of original sources, many unpublished, and to unravel the layers of cultural myth and legend that have shrouded his personality over the centuries.

There are some remarkable parallels between Amīr Khusrau's life and that of the renowned Sufi poet, Jalāluddīn Rūmī (d. 1273), who lived a generation or two before him. As a result of the Mongol incursion into Central Asia Rūmī fled westwards with his family and ended up in Konya, in what is now Turkey. Similarly, a couple of decades later, Khusrau's family moved eastwards and ended up in India. Both poets had their origins in the region of Balkh in present-day Afghanistan. There are some salient differences in their biographies: Khusrau was born in India, to a Turkish father and Indian mother, and identified himself as an Indian; Rūmī, ethnically Iranian, was born near Balkh, far from Konya, the city where he was to settle. Also, Khusrau was deeply involved in court life, and most of his Persian writing, whether poetry or prose, is of a panegyric or historical nature, whereas Rūmī was not a court poet and his output is entirely mystical. Thus, it is appropriate that Khusrau is honoured with the title *Amīr* (Prince) and Rūmī with *Mawlānā* (Our Master). Nevertheless, just as Rūmī had a deep attachment to his spiritual companion Shams, Khusrau was devoted to Nizāmuddīn Auliya. In poem 35 in our collection, Khusrau uses Rūmī's characteristic closing signature 'Silence', as he rues his failure to turn fully to a life of religious devotion. Most importantly, both were poets of Central Asian origin who deeply influenced the practice of Sufism in their respective parts of the world through their emphasis on the mystical performance of music and dance, and the poetic language in which it was expressed. Both were immersed in the local cultures and wrote macaronic poetry, mixing Persian with local languages (Persian, Turkish, Greek and Arabic in Rūmī's case; Persian and

Hindavi in Amīr Khusrau's). Since both chose to write their poetry in Persian and authored a large body of *ghazals* on themes of love, there are many points of comparison from a literary point of view as well, although one must be sensitive to the different historical and social contexts in which they were active as poets.

Amīr Khusrau's Life

Although Amīr Khusrau included much autobiographical information in his writings, the details of his origins are not clear. His father was Sayfuddīn Shamsī, whose Turkish name was Lāchīn, perhaps named after the obscure Lāchīn tribe from the region of Transoxiana in Central Asia, from where many people migrated to north India in the wake of the Mongol invasions. At least one scholar has suggested that Shamsī may have been of slave origins and named after his first master. In Delhi he served Sultan Iltutmish (r. 1211–36) in the police force of the city. It was not uncommon for Turkish slaves to attain high positions at the courts of rulers all over the Islamic world. Over time, as Khusrau's prestige and fame as a mystic increased, the writers chronicling his life creatively embellished this account of the origins of his family.

Sayfuddīn Shamsī married the daughter of 'Imād al-Mulk, an Indian Muslim who was also in the service of the sultan, first as the keeper of the royal falcon and later of the royal horse. Although the first- and second-generation Turkish immigrants were generally an elite group who looked down on recently converted Indian Muslims, it appears that intermarriage did take place between the two communities. Khusrau was proud of both sides of his lineage and his life and writings symbolize a synthesis of the two different cultures. Thus, Khusrau appropriately calls himself an 'Indian Turk' (in India the designation 'Turk' came to be synonymous with 'Muslim') and his Sufi master Nizāmuddīn Auliya called him the 'Turk of God'.

Sayfuddīn Shamsī had three sons, and our poet Abū al-Hasan 'Khusrau' was born in 1253 in Delhi and was most certainly the second of the male offspring. His brother 'Izzuddīn 'Alī Shāh went on to become a scholar of Arabic and Persian, while the other brother, Husāmuddīn Qutlugh became a professional soldier like their father. The report of a later biographer that Amīr Khusrau's birthplace was the village Patiyali (Etah district, UP), although now accepted as a fact, is not confirmed in the poet's own writings. It is true that the poet did spend some years there while serving in the military, but Khusrau's statements regarding his intense attachment to the capital city suggest that Delhi may indeed have been his birthplace.

Although Khusrau's father was illiterate he made sure that his sons received a proper education. He died in battle when the poet was eight, and as a result, the boys were raised by their maternal uncles and maternal grandfather, a powerful nobleman in service at court for over eighty years. Khusrau writes with great fondness about his grandfather who was the most influential figure in his life during his formative years. Even before he reached his teens Khusrau started to compose poetry in Persian. His talent did not go unnoticed by his elders and he passed a poetic test with flying colours. This was the time when the poet got his first pen-name (*takhallus*), 'Sultani', which he used in his earliest poems. On the question of language, Khusrau would have been educated in Arabic and Persian, perhaps spoken some Turki, and definitely have used Hindavi (the *khadi boli* of the Delhi region) as the language of daily life. However, Persian would be the language of choice for his literary works since it was the court language of the Delhi sultans.

It was at his grandfather's house that Amīr Khusrau met the young Sufi Nizāmuddīn Auliya, who had just moved to Delhi for his education, and who would later become one of the most renowned spiritual men connected to the city and the most important person in the poet's life. Khusrau's other closest intimate was the court poet and fellow Sufi Hasan Sijzi (d. 1337), whose life revolved around

the same institutions and personalities as Khusrau's. Though Hasan and Khusrau were both honoured with the title of *Amīr* for their prowess in the art of poetry, Hasan is today better known for his work *Favā'id al-fu'ād* (Morals of the Heart), in which he recorded the discourses of Nizāmuddīn Auliya.

Khusrau's career as a professional poet began in earnest when he was twenty, also the time when his grandfather passed away at the age of one hundred and thirteen. Under the mentorship of senior poets at the sultan's court, Khusrau began composing verses in praise of his patrons. For the next fifty years, until his death in 1325, Khusrau was a courtier and poet, initially in the service of princes and nobles, then permanently at the court of the sultan of Delhi. Serving five rulers and witnessing the rule of several more, he managed to survive the political intrigues of the various factions and individuals at work in Delhi. This in-fighting probably propelled him further into Sufism. Khusrau lived simultaneously in the normally incompatible worlds of the mystic and the courtier. A ruler would often be arbitrary in showing favour to poets and Sufis of the city, and judging by the lives of many medieval Persian poets, the perils of being a panegyrist at court were great.

In medieval Islamic culture, praise poetry was one of the principal means for a ruler to establish and propagate his cultural and political legitimacy. The professional court poet could be richly rewarded for his services, but he was often regarded as a mercenary sycophant because he shifted allegiances without qualms and offered his praises to the highest bidder. Khusrau admits that praising patrons is a tiresome task even if it results in fine poetry. He uses the metaphor of Jesus's breath, which is supposed to bestow life on the dead: just as it rejuvenates a lamp's flame, so good poetry erases the negative aspects of insincere praise. Often Khusrau and poets like him state that they utter no lies but only report the truth. Court poets, however, were not objective recorders of the character and deeds of their patrons; rather, they presented

an idealized image of the ruler. They were professionals whose livelihood depended on their mastery of current literary trends and the existence of generous patrons, and they competed with a whole class of wandering poets who were continuously seeking better prospects for themselves. Once a poet became successful and a favourite at court, he could not easily disassociate himself from his patron. The court poet played many roles: he was an entertainer, but also a boon companion (*nadīm*) and friend to the ruler; he was a propagandist, but also an advisor who could use his poetry as a means of instructing his patron in proper conduct.

Amīr Khusrau's first patron was Kishlū Khān (also known as Malik Chhajjū), a nobleman and nephew of Sultan Balban (r. 1266–87). Based in Sunnam, west of Delhi, Malik Chhajjū was celebrated as a generous patron of poets. However, at the end of two years' service, Amīr Khusrau fell out of Malik Chhajjū's favour for accepting a gift from his cousin, the emperor's son Bughrā Khān, who was also a great admirer of Khusrau's poems. As a result, Khusrau took up service with his new patron and settled in Samana (Punjab), but he stayed there only briefly before moving on to Lakhnauti (Bengal) where Bughrā Khān was sent to quell a rebellion. Bughrā Khān was a connoisseur of music and the arts, but the poet soon left his service and returned to Delhi because he missed the city and his family. He often spoke candidly of his deep attachment to the city, which he considered his home. In one of his poems, written when he was absent from Delhi, he says:

My home was the Dome of Islam.
It was the *qibla* for kings of the seven climes.
Delhi is the twin of pure paradise,
a prototype of the heavenly throne on an earthly scroll.

Such statements link his name to the city and helped in building the reputation of the sultanate capital as a major centre of Persian

poetry in the Islamic world. Khusrau is often given the added appellation of Dihlavi or Dehlvi (of Delhi).

In 1280, Amīr Khusrau attracted the attention and became the *nadīm* of the sultan's son, the young prince Khān Malik Sultān Muhammad, who was by all accounts a warm, generous and charming individual. Prince Muhammad was fond of poetry and gathered the best poets around him. His court at Multan was a significant cultural centre that rivalled even Delhi for a time. Multan was home to the Suhrawardi Sufi order and Khusrau must have had contacts with the Sufis based there. In all likelihood, he witnessed and participated in performances of devotional singing that would later develop into the *qawwālī*. The memory of the famous Persian mystical poet Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289)—who had lived in Multan for twenty-five years before returning to the western Islamic lands—must have been fresh in the community, and Amīr Khusrau would have heard 'Irāqī's *ghazals* which were also popular with the Chishti Sufis. Khusrau's friend Hasan had also accompanied him to Multan in the service of Prince Muhammad. According to one tradition, Muhammad twice invited the famous poet of Iran, Sa'dī of Shiraz (d. 1292), a literary giant and model for all poets writing in Persian at this time, to come and settle in Multan where the prince was going to name an institution of learning after him. It is even claimed that Sa'dī did visit India to meet Amīr Khusrau but these accounts are not confirmed by any reliable source of the period.

Amīr Khusrau's sojourn in Multan lasted five years and came to an abrupt end in 1285 when Timur Khān Tātār led a Mongol foray into the Punjab. In the ensuing battle, Prince Muhammad was killed and Khusrau taken captive. The poet spent a short time as prisoner, a horrifying experience that he later described in graphic detail. He and Hasan both wrote moving elegies on the death of their beloved patron, and when they returned home, all of Delhi was in mourning for the prince who was henceforth called the Martyr

Prince (*Sultān-i shahīd*). The powerful elegy by Amīr Khusrau in eleven stanzas reveals the depth of his grief:

People shed so many tears in all directions
that five other rivers have appeared in Multan.
I wanted to speak of the fire in my heart
but a hundred fiery tongues flared up in my mouth.

The death of the prince changed the very geography of the poet's world in ways that exceeded all expression. Written in the typical poetic idiom of the *marsīya* (elegy), the poem is a poignant and sincere elegy for the virtuous young patron, and it was said that when the sultan in Delhi heard the poem he was moved to tears. For his part, Hasan wrote his elegy in prose, in order not to compete or be compared with his friend.

After returning to Delhi, Amīr Khusrau kept a low profile, spending time with his family. Scattered references in Khusrau's works testify to his deep and sincere attachment to his family. He mentions his maternal grandfather in fond terms as an influential figure in his early years. His mother, to whom he was especially close, is also mentioned a few times and his elegy on her death in 1299—which occurred the same year that he lost one of his two brothers—speaks of his sense of personal loss. As for other family members, there is no mention of his wife anywhere in his works but there are references to his children. He addresses his daughter Mastūra at the end of his work *Matla' al-anvār*, while in his poem *Hasht bihisht*, he gives advice to another daughter Afifa. He gives advice to his son Khizr in *Majnūn Lailā*. Two sons, Muhammad and Hājji, died during the poet's lifetime while another, Malik Ahmad, was known to be active as a court poet under Sultan Firūzshāh Tughlaq (r. 1351–75).

The political situation in Delhi was unstable at this time and Khusrau went east to Avadh for a brief stint in the service of the new governor,

the freedman 'Alī Sarjāndār Hātim Khān. He returned to Delhi in 1289, and as though to celebrate his return to the city, Khusrau wrote:

Dehli:

Refuge of religion!
 Refuge and paradise of justice!
 Long may it endure!
 Since it is a heavenly paradise
 in every essential quality,
 may God keep it free from calamity.

This verse appears in the work *Qirān al-sa'dain* (Conjunction of Two Stars) that he was commissioned to write by the new sultan, Kaiqubād (r. 1287–90), to commemorate the reunion between the sultan and his father Bughrā Khān, Khursau's one-time patron. This work was the first narrative poem on a theme from the history of his own times and an innovative step in his growth as a court poet. Sultan Kaiqubād did not survive long and died the following year at the age of twenty-two in 1290.

One year later, Amīr Khusrau joined the court of the new sultan, Jalāluddīn Khaljī (r. 1290–96), and from then until his death he was continuously connected with the court of Delhi, having progressed from serving provincial officials to being the chief poet at the imperial court. Under Jalāluddīn Khaljī and 'Alāuddīn Khaljī (r. 1296–1316), both of whom were of Afghan background, Khusrau was at his peak as a professional poet. When Sultan Jalāluddīn began his short reign, he was a man of advanced years but had a great zeal for the arts and was an ardent admirer of Amīr Khusrau's poetry. The contemporary historian Ziyāuddīn Barnī describes the monarch's fondness for Khusrau:

Sultan Jalāluddīn was a connoisseur and patron of the arts. He had an elegant disposition and could compose quatrains and *ghazals*. What clearer proof could there have been of his refined nature and

connoisseurship than the fact that just when he had become the war minister he extolled Amīr Khusrau, who was the chief of the court poets from first to last, and held him in great esteem . . . and fixed upon him a stipend of 1200 *tankas* which had been his father's, and gave him horses, vestments and his own slaves. When he became king, Amīr Khusrau became one of his intimates at court and served as keeper of the Qur'ān.

In the pleasure assemblies (*mahfil*), there was a great deal of drinking, jesting and exchange of poetry, accompanied by music, singing and dancing by women and young boys who would also serve wine. In fact, the figure of the *sāqī* or cupbearer is a stock character in Khusrau's *ghazals*. These assemblies provide the implied setting for much of his lyric poetry, and Barnī states, 'Amīr Khusrau would bring new *ghazals* daily to those assemblies and the sultan became enamoured of his poems and rewarded him handsomely.' The reign of 'Alāuddīn Khaljī, Jalāluddīn's nephew and successor, witnessed a cultural renaissance, exceeding even the standards of other Delhi sultans for patronage of literature and the arts. Architecture and building activities flourished and all sorts of historical, poetic and scientific works were written in Persian.

In the last decade of his life, Amīr Khusrau served the new sultan, Mubārak Shāh (r. 1316–20), the young and handsome son of 'Alāuddīn Khaljī, who had come to the throne as the result of a bloody coup. Mubārak Shāh was not well disposed towards Nizāmuddīn Auliya because his brother Khizr Khān, whom he had killed in his bid for the throne, had been a disciple of the *pīr*. This must have been the cause of some tension between the sultan and Khusrau, but since the latter was a senior and established poet by this time, he probably was able to maintain a neutral ground. What followed was a particularly turbulent period of history, and it must have taken all of Khusrau's diplomatic skills and spiritual

fortitude to maintain a presence at court and celebrate the deeds of his patrons. The promising young monarch Mubārak Shāh had become slavishly attached to his male lover, Khusrau Khān, a recent convert to Islam who eventually usurped the throne after having had Mubārak Shāh murdered. A few months later, the usurper was removed by Ghiyāsuddīn Tughlaq (r. 1320–25). The events of this period have all the drama, debauchery and violence of ancient Rome in its period of decline, and it was up to the poet to spin all this into an epic. Sultan Ghiyāsuddīn was a pious and orthodox individual who looked askance at the musical gatherings at the *khānaqāh* of Nizāmuddīn Auliya. Khusrau's last patron was Muhammad Shāh (r. 1325–51), the son and successor of Ghiyāsuddīn.

Nizāmuddīn Auliya passed away in 1325 while Amīr Khusrau was with the sultan on a military campaign in the east. It is said that when he heard the news about his *pīr*'s death, he recited the following couplet in Hindavi (see poem 73) that has become a core part of the *qawwālī* repertoire:

*gorī sove sej par mukh par dāre kes
chal Khusrau ghar apne sānjh bhain sau des*

Amīr Khusrau himself died a few months later in Delhi and was buried near Nizāmuddīn Auliya's grave. His tomb, which dates from the Mughal period, has been added to and decorated at various times over the centuries. The site is a place of pilgrimage and gatherings for devout pilgrims and Sufis. The 'urs or death anniversaries of Nizāmuddīn Auliya (18 Rabī' al-sānī) and Amīr Khusrau (17 Shawwāl) are both occasions on which Sufis from all over South Asia come together.

Amīr Khusrau's Indian Cultural Legacy

Communities of Muslims were already established in India in the early years of Islam, primarily in the trading communities on the

Malabar coast and in the regions of Sindh and Gujarat. It was the conquest of northern India by Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazni (d. 1030), the ruler of a vast empire, that brought about the inclusion of India in the world of Islam. Although Turkish-speaking, the Ghaznavids were the cultural and political heirs of the earlier Persian dynasty of the Samanids in Bukhara. The Samanids had established themselves in the early ninth century and their institutions and courtly culture had a Persian orientation, as was true of the eastern Islamic world in general. As the Turks of Central Asia converted to Islam and served as slaves in the courts and armies of the Muslim rulers, they in turn became empowered and founded new dynasties.

By the latter part of the eleventh century, the rule of the Ghaznavids had been established in north-western India, and it became a thriving cultural centre. At this time, Lahore was home to court poets such as Abū al-Faraj Rūnī (d. ca 1102) and Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān (d. 1121), and the Sufi Shaikh Hujvīrī 'Dātā Ganj Bakhsh' (d. 1071), who wrote the first Persian Sufi manual, *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Unveiling of the Veiled), and whose shrine in the city is a centre for mystics and pilgrims to this day. The Ghaznavids increasingly turned eastwards as they lost their Iranian possessions to another Turkish dynasty, the Seljuqs, but even here they eventually lost out to a ruling house known as the Ghurids, based in Ghur, in the hilly regions of western Afghanistan. As successors to the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids shifted the centres of power and culture closer to the Indian heartlands and away from the frontier, to the cities of Uchh, Multan and Delhi.

At the Battle of Tarain under the leadership of Mu'izzuddīn Muhammad, the Ghurids won a decisive victory over the Hindu rulers, the Chauhans, and the Turkish slave Qutbuddīn Aibek was appointed as deputy in Delhi, which became the seat of a new polity. In the next few decades, Muslims began to consolidate their power under the rule of sultans such as Iltutmish, who was succeeded by his formidable daughter, Raziya (r. 1236–40), one of the few women rulers in medieval Islam, Nāsiruddīn (r. 1246–66)

and Balban (r. 1266–87). These rulers of slave origin were followed by the Khaljī and Tughlaq dynasties whose rule lasted until the fourteenth century.

Meanwhile, the Mongol invasion of Central Asia and Iran in the early thirteenth century led many scholars, poets, artisans and religious figures to migrate to India and settle in and around Delhi, since as a place of refuge it had come to be known as the Dome of Islam (*qubbat al-Islām*). These émigrés brought their skills, institutions and religious and literary traditions with them, and as these came into contact with local cultural practices a uniquely Indian form of Islamic civilization was born. Thirteenth-century Delhi was an amalgamation of several cities whose traces have not completely disappeared from the city's topography. Its foundations were laid near the Hindu citadel of Lalkot, in the present-day area of Mehrauli, and soon the villages of Kilokhri, Siri (modern-day Shahpur), Ghiyaspur, Jahanpanah, were all integrated into this thriving metropolis. The architectural monuments built over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the tombs of the early rulers, the victory tower Qutb Minār, Qubbat al-Islām Mosque, the water reservoirs Hauz Shamsī and the Hauz Khās, and the city of Tughlaqābād, attest to the existence of powerful and centralized ruling houses that were conscious of the city's unique position in the world of Islam and South Asia.

By the time of Amīr Khusrau's birth in 1253, in half a century under a succession of Turkish rulers, Delhi had become a cosmopolitan city renowned throughout the Islamic world for its institutions of learning and as a haven for wandering scholars and poets. In the early days of the slave rulers, the city was administered by an elite corps of Turkish nobles known as the *chihilgān* (The Forty) whose power declined over time as Indians began to participate in the government. The indigenous population consisted chiefly of Hindus, Jains, and two broad categories of Muslims: Indian converts and immigrants from Central Asia

who had settled there as refugees or were attracted by the centres of learning, such as the Mu'izzī *madrasa*, and by the generous patronage of the rulers. Such institutions also attracted Sufis, and Delhi's thriving markets brought in merchants and traders. The Moroccan traveller Ibn Battūta reached Delhi in 1333, a few years after Amīr Khusrau's death, and describes the society in great detail. According to him Delhi was the metropolis of India that combined beauty with strength, even calling it the largest city in the eastern Muslim world.

Despite its rapid rise to prominence, the capital city of the sultanate was beset with political upheavals and instability throughout the thirteenth century, due, on the one hand, to the repeated Mongol raids in the north-west (sometimes right into the environs of Delhi), and on the other, to the ruthless battles of succession for the throne and the years of short-lived and unstable rule of usurpers. Nevertheless, there were prolonged periods of stability during which many artistic and cultural endeavours were undertaken and creative energies allowed to flower, as the surviving architectural and literary monuments testify.

Arabic was the language of the religious sciences and technical disciplines, while Persian was more widely used both in speech and writing. Persian was the literary and cultural language of the eastern Islamic world and of a cosmopolitan literary world that at this time extended from Anatolia and the Caucasus to Bengal. The Samanid and Ghaznavids had been the earliest patrons of Persian court literature, and even though the Ghaznavid sultan, Mahmūd, and some of the Muslim rulers of India were of Turkish origin, Turkish never became a literary language in India, nor did it receive courtly patronage. Hindavi was the language of the people around Delhi, but being in a formative stage it still had not achieved high cultural status. Its development into a full-fledged literary medium was the result of the impetus given by poets like Khusrau and the Sufis who had more direct contact with the populace.

In the history of the spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, the role of the Sufis cannot be overestimated. It was due to the tireless efforts of these mystics who wandered off into every corner of the land and made contact with people at all levels of society that Islam became part of the local religious landscape. It was also due to the medieval Sufis and Hindu mystics of the *bhakti* movement that vernacular languages came into their own and took their place next to the more prestigious languages of India, Persian and Sanskrit. There were two primary Sufi orders (*silsila*) in India at this time and they varied fundamentally in their practices as well as their relationship to the state and to the populace. Originating in Iraq, the Suhrawardi Sufi order was established in Multan, on the western frontier of the Delhi sultanate, in the thirteenth century by Shaikh Bahāuddīn Zakariyā; it was about the same time that the Chishti order became prominent in the capital city. The Chishti presence in Delhi dated from the time of the visit of the great master Shaikh Muʿīnuddīn Chishtī, who came there in 1193 but moved on to Ajmer (Rajasthan) in the heart of the Hindu dominions, and his disciple Qutbuddīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, who settled in Delhi, where his tomb is situated. The towering figure among them and the most influential *pīr* (spiritual leader) was Nizāmuddīn Auliya, who had inherited the leadership (*khilāfat*) of the order from Shaikh Farīduddīn in 1266.

No study of the social or literary history of the times can ignore the presence of Nizāmuddīn Auliya in the city and his influence on the lives of so many of his contemporaries. By all accounts, he had a charismatic personality and led a life steadfastly devoted to providing for the spiritual needs of his community. Although the Chishtis preferred to have nothing to do with the sultan and his court in Delhi, they had an influence on the populace, and this created tensions with both the ruling powers and the religious clergy (*ʿulamā*), neither of whom were favourably disposed to this order. The Suhrawardis, for their part, generally maintained friendly relations with the Delhi sultans and, unlike the Chishtis, belonged

to an affluent and landowning institution. The Chishtis did not accept any grants from the sultans and emphasized poverty and austerity as essential to spiritual realization, and consequently they exerted an abiding spiritual power over the hearts of the people of Delhi. Generous throughout his lifetime, Nizāmuddīn Auliya, who never married, is said to have given away all his belongings before he died.

Early biographers of Amīr Khusrau corroborate his deep interest in and involvement with the world of music. Although details about his exact contribution to this field—in the way of theoretical writings on musicology or innovations with instruments—are lacking in the sources of his time and may never be known to us, there is ample evidence in Amīr Khusrau's own writings that he had more than a cursory interest in music. Each art enhances the other but one is demonstrably more powerful and effective than the other (see poem 51). Poetry can stand on its own, but the music accompanying it is like an ornament on a bride. Just as there is an apocryphal anecdote about Rūmī passing through the bazaar of the goldsmiths and being inspired by the rhythmic sound of their tools to compose a poem, so there is one about Amīr Khusrau replicating the sound of the cotton carder's bow in a verse.

References to music and musical instruments abound in Amīr Khusrau's poetry, but this is not surprising since Persian poets used a broad range of imagery in their poems (see, for example, poems 12, 30 and 36). However, the details he provides demonstrate that he had technical knowledge of the musical arts. Since Khusrau's poems were put to music and performed in his own time, he may even have played an active role in setting the lyrics to music. It is regrettable that no theoretical writings on music by Amīr Khusrau survive although they were believed to exist at one time. Scattered references in his works provide some clues regarding the state of music back then. In *Nuh sipihr* (Nine Heavens), he claims that foreign musicians visiting India have introduced new features to Indian music but have not added anything to the basic principles.

He says that the sound of Indian music captivates the wild deer, even in the face of the hunter's arrow: it is pierced and dies, not by the arrow but by the music. In his work *I'jāz-i Khusrauī*, Khusrau describes various musical instruments, mentions the accomplished musicians of his day and recounts the arrival of a group of musicians from Central Asia who competed with Indian artistes.

The investigations of the late Indian scholar Shahab Sarmadee have done much to add to our understanding of Khusrau's place in Indian music. One of the many apocryphal stories about Amīr Khusrau describes his victory in a contest with a famous Indian musician Gopāl and his wresting of the title *nāyāk* (the leader of a musical troupe) for himself. It is also clear that Amīr Khusrau was familiar with both the Indian and Persian musical systems of his day. The exact nature of his experiments with combining the *rāgas* of Indian music with the *maqām* and *pardah* system of Arabic and Persian music cannot be ascertained. He is said to have introduced variations of melody and tempo and come up with over a dozen new modes in Indian music, some of which—such as *sāzgīrī*, *shāhāna*, and *zilāf*—are still known today. The introduction of the *khayāl* genre of music, which is the main vocal form performed today, is often attributed to Amīr Khusrau or to the fifteenth-century Sultan Husain Sharqī of Jaunpur. Another type of composition that he authored is the *tarāna*, an onomatopoeic string of meaningless syllables interspersed with other bits of poetic lines and sung in any *rāga*. With so many attributions to his name, perhaps it is safe to use the term current among musicologists, *Khusrauī* style, to describe compositions that may have been influenced by Amīr Khusrau or whose core can be traced to him. His greatest innovations are said to be the instruments *sitār* and *tablā*, now an essential part of Hindustani music, but there is no historical basis to the claim.

Amīr Khusrau's connections to music continue to be a dynamic part of the living traditions of not only North Indian classical music but also the now universally popular form of *qawwālī*. Music is an

essential component of *qawwālī*, which is the ecstatic and hypnotic performance of Sufi verses, often accompanied by dance. The use of the term *qawwālī* equally signifies the lyrics of the poems that are employed in the performance, the singing, and the whole presentation itself. The word is derived from the Arabic *qawl* (utterance, speech) and the form is actually a mixture of the Arabic *qawl* and the Persian *ghazal*. The Sufi practice of listening to music (*samā'*) as part of their spiritual exercises has been a controversial topic throughout history, but the Chishtis were and are particularly inclined to it, and the art of *qawwālī* has been fostered at the their shrine complexes from Delhi and Ajmer to Lahore and Karachi. The invention of this form of dance music and the training of the first generation of singers (*qawwāl bachche*) is often ascribed to Amīr Khusrau. But it is likely that some form of *qawwālī* formed part of the devotional practices of Sufis before Amīr Khusrau. In its present state, it is a uniquely South Asian development that emerged from the universal Sufi practice of dance music and over time has taken on distinct styles according to particular regional influences and schools of music. It is a constantly evolving form and the earliest recordings of *qawwālī* from the turn of the last century are different from the current style of performance, but the core has always been Amīr Khusrau's poetry.

Qawwālī provides the form in which Amīr Khusrau's poetry in Hindavi and Persian is still known and performed in a live context that is completely removed from the written and illustrated tradition of his writings that is part of the culture of books. As literary texts, lyrics sung in *qawwālī* are intertextual and combine Khusrau's poems with occasional Arabic quotations and lines of Persian Sufi poetry. The repertoire of *qawwālī* is dynamic and now accommodates all kinds of Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi verses. Thus, the language of *qawwālī* appeals to non-Muslims as well as Muslim South Asians since the poet often expresses his devotion for Prophet Muhammad, Hazrat 'Alī or to Nizāmuddīn

Auliya in terms that are found in Hindu devotional contexts. The combination of lyrics, especially in the order of the verses, can vary considerably and it is very difficult to establish a fixed text of these poems. Among the *ghazals* translated in this volume, poems 16, 23, 27 and 45 have all entered the *qawwālīs*' repertoire. The renditions by the maestro Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan have especially mesmerized listeners around the world.

Although not a *ghazal*, this well-known verse by Khusrau represents the deep bond between poet and *pīr* that made them one entity:

man tu shudam, tu man shudī
man jān shudam, tu tan shudī
tā nagūyad kasī pas az-īn
man dīgaram u tu dīgārī

I have become you, you have become me.
 I have become life, you have become body.
 From now on, let no one say that
 I am other and you are another.

This is not an unusual couplet in the context of the entire poem, but it has taken on a life of its own and developed into an emblematic Sufi text.

Amīr Khusrau's Hindavi and Persian poems are also sung in a secular context. The Afghan classical performer Ustad Mohammad Sarahang, who was both the court musician of King Zāhir and professor of music at Kabul University, has rendered the poet's Persian *ghazals* in a style that is characteristic of the Kabul school of classical music with its roots in India. A range of artistes—from the maestro *ghazal* singers such as Iqbal Bano and Mehdi Hasan to popular singers of Bombay cinema such as Mukesh—have sung the Persian lyrics of Amīr Khusrau, contributing new dimensions to the enjoyment of the poems.

Whether Amīr Khusrau really wrote poetry in a vernacular language and, if so, whether the Hindavi corpus ascribed to him is really his work, are difficult questions from a textual and historical point of view. As he himself says:

I am a parrot of India if you ask me candidly.
 Ask me in Hindavi so that I can answer you correctly.

This verse has primarily been taken to signify his pride in being a poet in his mother tongue, but is clearly no indication of what he actually composed in this language. Elsewhere, he reiterates this opinion, this time downplaying his ability to compose Arabic verse:

I am a Turk of Hindustan, I answer in Hindavi.
 I don't have Egyptian sugar to speak Arabic.

'Sugar' refers to the poet's words that have the quality of sweetness. Such a display of self-deprecation appears to be merely a poetic stance and should not be interpreted literally.

The use of a vernacular register of poetry in Hindavi, using forms such as *gīt* and *dohā*, may have started before Amīr Khusrau, but it became increasingly common from his time onwards. Alongside all the writing taking place in Persian, there was a parallel movement to produce literature in vernacular languages so as to make works more accessible to those who were not literate or who did not participate in the Persian courtly tradition. Both Sufis and Hindu poets of the *bhakti* devotional movement used the language spoken by people in their communities to adapt from and transform the established poetic conventions. In Khusrau's Hindavi poetry, his *pīr* is called the *jag ujīyāro* (world illuminator) and *mahārāj* (emperor) along with a number of other epithets that were shared among devotees of different faiths in India. Literature produced at royal courts was meant for the international, cosmopolitan audience of the broader Persianate world. By contrast, the works

found in Sufi *khānaqāhs* had a more local and socially inclusive audience. The entire body of Khusrau's Hindavi poems is based on oral traditions and has been inextricably merged with other folk songs and poems. The written tradition of these works dates only to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The spoken language that was called Hindavi was constantly changing and the songs in their current state perhaps represent the first recorded recension of these works. During the medieval period, minor poets would add their own poems to the oeuvre of recognized masters in order to derive prestige by association with them. However, since nobody doubts the fact that Khusrau wrote in Hindavi and the question of authenticity is moot, the point is to focus on how these texts have been received and continue to be part of a living tradition.

Some of Amīr Khusrau's Hindi verses show how a composite culture blending Perso-Islamic and Indian elements was created (see poem 54). In a brilliant macaronic poem attributed to him (*zi hāl-i miskīn makun taghāful, durā'e nainān banā'e batiyān*), the poet combines Hindavi and Persian literary tropes and metaphors in the form of a dialogue between a Persian lover (*'āshiq*) and pining Indian heroine (*virahinī*). In a lyrical song, Nizāmuddīn Auliya asks the Chishti Sufis to come out in their ecstatic state and join the celebrations of the Hindu spring festival of Holi, which is an occasion for great revelry and playfulness. True to their acceptance of local practices, Chishtis also celebrate the spring festival of *basant*. According to popular belief, it was an event in Khusrau's life that led them to participate in this festival. One day, he saw some Hindu women singing and carrying mustard flowers to offer to their deity on the religious festival of *basant panchmī*. In order to cheer up Nizāmuddīn Auliya, who was depressed about his nephew's death, Khusrau dressed up like a Hindu woman and proceeded towards his *pīr* singing a song he had heard. This brought a smile to Nizāmuddīn Auliya's face and the festival became a major celebration, with a whole ritual associated with it that is part of the Chishti tradition. There are also songs said to have been composed by Khusrau

especially for the occasion of *basant*. Writing in the Indic tradition, some of Khusrau's Hindavi poems are utterances in a female voice that are often addressed to her absent lover or a parent (see poems 65–73). Translating the Hindavi poems of Khusrau poses a special problem due to the lack of a fixed text and multiple variations current in the oral repertoire. Terms like *rang*, literally 'colour' but conveying a complex range of cultural connotations, also challenge the translator of these poems (see poems 65, 67 and 72).

In addition to the devotional songs about Nizāmuddīn Auliya, Amīr Khusrau's name is attached to women's folk songs sung at weddings, riddles, and any genre of Hindavi poetry that involves double entendre or wordplay. The fact that the poet was so fond of puns and enjoyed switching language codes makes a strong case for his having authored this body of literature. In addition to Persian riddles (*chīstān*), there is a category (*dosukhane*) where the question is asked in two languages while the answer is a homonym that answers both questions:

Tishna rā chī mībāyad? (Persian) *Milāp ko kyā chāhiye?*
(Hindi/Urdu)

What does the thirsty person need? What is required
for a union?

Chāh/Well/Desire

The riddle can take another form:

I saw a wondrous child in the land of Hindustan,
his skin covered his hair, and his hair his bones!

Answer: Mango

There are innumerable riddles like these in a *Khusravī* mode whose corpus increased over the centuries.

Folk poetry also draws on another genre, the quatrain in the *shahrāshūb* genre, which in Persian is a flirtatious exchange between the poet and a beautiful lad (or lady in the Indian context) who is engaged in a particular trade or task. In some of these, the first three lines are Persian while the last is mixed Persian–Hindavi. In poem 64, the last line uttered by the woman is a pun, i.e., it can be read in either Persian or Hindavi. A selection of Khusrau's poems of this type has been included in the translations (see poems 55–64), although at times one has to resort to the glossary to understand the meaning of a certain term on which the conceit of the poem hinges. The range of people that the poet addresses represents the social range of a typical Indian city and reveals his fascination for the details of everyday life. Khusrau's playful side can also be seen in a category of Hindavi poetry of a bawdy nature—called *kah mukarnī*—which takes the form of two female friends conversing about one of their lovers. These poems also rely on witty wordplay and were traditionally sung by women. There are a number of such *mukarnīs* attributed to Khusrau, and although it is difficult to capture the earthiness of the original in English, a few of these are included in this volume (poems 74–78).

In the same way that Amīr Khusrau has been crowned as the father of Indo-Persian poetry, so he has been invoked as the founder of the Urdu language in order to enhance the prestige of the language that is relatively new in South Asia, but related to Hindavi and Persian. Thus, works like the once popular *Tale of the Four Dervishes*, which is extant in Urdu translations, was wrongly attributed to Amīr Khusrau, as was the dictionary of Persian–Hindi, *Khāliq bārī*, that is now believed to have been written in the seventeenth century by one Ziyāuddīn Khusrau.

Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), who had accompanied Sultan Mahmūd to India, was the first learned Muslim to write about India in a systematic and scientific manner in his scholarly work *Kitāb al-Hind* as a result of first-hand observation of its peoples and cultural practices. Although al-Bīrūnī had studied Sanskrit to

be able to read Hindu texts, his viewpoint was that of an outsider. Later, in the Mughal period, the courtier Abū al-Faẓl (d. 1602) in his monumental *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (Institutes of Akbar) had continued the scientific tradition of documenting everything about India. But no other author in Persian can match Khusrau's imaginative style when writing about India. From his elaborate system of languages to quotidian titbits of information, his works have done much to enhance our knowledge about thirteenth- and fourteenth-century India. However, it should be kept in mind that Khusrau is not claiming to be a detached scholar like al-Bīrūnī, and some of his fanciful ideas must be understood in the context of his creative endeavour and the different literary genres he employs.

The *Nuh sipihr* (Nine Heavens) is a literary tour de force in verse that has never been matched in the history of Persian literature. Section three of this work consists of an encyclopaedic paean to the land of his birth and provides information on different aspects of Indian culture. Khusrau puts forward his belief in the superiority of India in the Islamic world in no uncertain terms and constructs several fanciful arguments to prove that India is akin to paradise: it is the land to which Adam first came after being expelled from paradise, according to one Islamic tradition; the peacock, the bird of paradise, is a native species; the climate is pleasant and moderate, he says, referring to a saying (*ḥadīth*) by Prophet Muhammad that he enjoyed the cool breeze that wafted from India; and last but not least, India is superior because the poet's patron lives there. To settle the matter, he boasts that this is the land where a great poet like himself resides! The abundance of the flora and fauna, fruits like mangoes and bananas, spices like cardamom and cloves, and the quintessentially Indian betel leaf (*pān*) add to the virtues of this land. He goes on to describe the religion and learning of the Brahmins in a lively and anecdotal style. India's contributions to world civilization include the game of chess and the book of stories *Kalīla wa Dimna* that was translated from the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* into Middle Persian and other Middle Eastern languages. There is a

compendium of the different kinds of birds and animals found in India here, as well as descriptions of the marvels and wonders of the land, especially the supernatural powers of the Hindu yogis. Towards the end of the India section of the work, he comments on the intelligence of the inhabitants of the country and the openness of the culture:

If a Khurasani, Greek or Arab comes here,
he will not face any problems,
for the people will treat him kindly, as their own,
making him feel happy and at ease.
And if they jest with him,
they do so with blooming smiles.

It is remarkable that this perception of India as an open society, which seems quite modern in some ways, was already formed in the early fourteenth century.

In this work Khusrau claims that he has learned several languages, and the poet propounds a fascinating discourse on the languages of the world:

Hindavi was the language from old times; when the Ghurids and Turks arrived [in India], Persian began to be used and every high and low person learned it . . . As I belong to India, it is only fitting that I talk about it. There is a different, original language in every region of this land. Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Kibar, Dhaur Samundari, Tilangi, Gujar, Ma'bari, Gauri, the languages of Bangalah, Avadh, Delhi and its environs, all these are Hindavi, i.e., Indian languages, current since the olden days and commonly used for all kinds of speech. There is yet another language that is favoured by all the Brahmins. It is known as Sanskrit

since ancient times; common people do not know it, only the Brahmins do, but one single Brahmin cannot comprehend its limits. Like Arabic, Sanskrit has a grammar, rules of syntax, and a literature . . . Sanskrit is a pearl; it may be inferior to Arabic but is superior to Dari . . . If I knew it well I would praise my sultan in it also.

In Khusrau's world view, the three classical languages of Islam, Arabic, Persian and Turkish, complement the host of Indian languages, and each has its specific sphere of usage, either as a language of learning, administration, literature or communication. It seems that Turkish was spoken by an elite group in India but no literature in it was produced, even by the poet, who in poem 37 playfully bemoans his inability to speak in the language of his Turkish-speaking paramour. Persian was more current in India for administrative and literary purposes, but it did not seem to be in competition with any other major language. Elsewhere, in the introduction to his third *divān*, he includes a similar discussion about languages, where he states that unlike Hindavi, which changes every hundred miles, the Persian of India, i.e., Dari, is standard from the river Indus to the Indian Ocean and does not have dialect variants as in Iran. 'What is amusing,' he declares, 'is that we [Indians] have composed poetry in the languages of all people [of the world] but no one has composed poetry in our language.'

In this encyclopaedic section on India in his work, Amīr Khusrau is attempting to put forward an alternative world view, one that is Indo-centric and that challenges the existing ideas about the classification of civilizations in the world of Islam. Islam is central to this new world view, but there is room for all the complexities of Indian cultural traditions. Khusrau's hyperbolic arguments must be seen as rhetorical exercises intended to impress his audience. What he is trying to do in this work is to instill a sense of pride in Indians, Muslims in particular, and to give them a distinct culture within

the context of a larger Islamic civilization, just as the Arabs and Persians had their own culture from early Islamic times. He sincerely believes that the *sharī'at* attained perfection in India and that it was the ideal place for the flowering of Muslim civilization.

Amīr Khusrau's Persian Poetry

Amīr Khusrau's literary achievements in Persian form a seminal part of both the Indo-Persian tradition and of the broader, trans-regional Persian literary canon that includes the works of classical poets such as Nizāmī, Sa'dī and Hāfiz. The first generation of Persian poets in India from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries in Ghaznavid Lahore, such as Abū al-Faraj Rūnī and Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān, continued the Persian literary traditions of the Iranian courts in the poetic genres and imagery that they employed. Of these two early poets, it is in the works of Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān that we find the earliest consciousness of a new poetics and the expansion of the traditional world view to include elements of the new landscape. Gradually, a distinctly Indo-Persian literature came into existence that lasted until the twentieth century. In the two centuries intervening between this time and that of Amīr Khusrau, Persian poetry was written and cultivated in the subcontinent, mostly at the Ghaznavid court in Lahore, but much of this body of work is lost to us and only stray verses survive as quotations in dictionaries, historical works or anthologies. When Delhi became the capital city of the new rulers, it inherited many of the cultural institutions and literary practices of the earlier Ghaznavid court, causing a new literary florescence. The primary agents in this process were Amīr Khusrau and Hasan. The Sufi literary scene of Khusrau's time was as brisk as the courtly one. There were a number of non-courtly Sufi writers such as Ziyāuddīn Nakhshabī, author of the Persian rendition of the popular Sanskrit work *Tūtīnāma* (Tales of the Parrot), and the ecstatic mystic Bū 'Alī Qalandar who had migrated from Iraq to keep company with the Chishtis.

The Sufi *khānaqāh* was an important location in medieval Indian society where poetry was produced and performed in a less elitist atmosphere than the royal court. Amīr Khusrau seems to be one of the few poets who was simultaneously a court poet in the business of praising kings as well as a Sufi poet whose poems were performed in a mystical context. Khusrau's affiliation with the Chishti Sufis strengthened during the time when Nizāmuddīn Auliya was achieving an eminent status in the city, and his meeting place (*khānaqāh* or *jamā'atkhāna*) in the village of Ghiyaspur (the present-day Nizamuddin area of Delhi) was a spiritual centre where people from all walks of life gathered to listen to his words and join in mystical sessions. The Sufis had a major role in the conversion of Indians to Islam and their presence in Delhi acted as a stabilizing force in the face of the uncertainties of court politics for they looked after the spiritual welfare of the community. 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's son, Khizr Khān, who was one of Amīr Khusrau's patrons, was also a devoted follower of Nizāmuddīn Auliya. Although 'Alāuddīn Khaljī himself did not frequent the Sufi *khānaqāhs*, he was positively inclined towards them, and thus Khusrau dedicated many of his works—in fact, all the poems of his *khamṣa*—to both his mentors simultaneously. Khusrau celebrated his spiritual master, who was known as the *mahbūb-i ilāhī* (Beloved of God), in poems written in all the literary genres available to him. For example, in poem 17, Khusrau almost certainly refers to Nizāmuddīn as 'God's good servant', his refuge from life's transience, and in poem 50, he celebrates his court as the place where angels flock like doves.

Amīr Khusrau was extremely conscious of his multicultural heritage. From his mother he acquired knowledge of the local culture and language which translated into an abiding love for indigenous traditions. As a poet writing in Persian he was aware of the larger world of Persian literary culture in which texts had a wide circulation across much of the non-Arab Islamic world. He writes with relish of the attractive quality of the Persian language:

Truly, the language of Fars is like pickles
for without pickles, food does not taste as good.

Highly educated audiences across the Persian-speaking world read his poems, but he was also judged locally by Indian critics and by standards that may not have been universal. He belonged to multiple worlds. It would appear that the Turk (the conqueror, lover) and the Hindu (the conquered slave, beloved), an extremely popular trope in Persian court poetry, came together in his person. As he says:

The opposition has been removed from Turk and Hindu,
for Hindustan has become one with Khurasan.

Since Khusrau was both of Turkish and Indian origins, he embodied the resolution of this conflict of opposites, and by bridging cultures he gave a distinct identity to Indo-Persian literature.

The panegyric ode (*qasīda*) was the most prestigious genre for the Persian court poet of this period. Many of Khusrau's early *qasīdas* are in the style of the great Persian poets of the Ghaznavid and Seljuq periods, such as Farrukhī, Anvarī, Khāqānī and Zahīr, who served as models for fledgling court poets right down to the nineteenth century. These odes are highly wrought poems that were written for ceremonial occasions and festivals such as the Iranian new year (*navrūz*) which was celebrated at Indian courts, and the Islamic Id al-Fitr and Id al-Azhā. Poems in this genre granted the poet an opportunity to advertise his patron's virtues while at the same time allowing him to comment upon the relationship between himself and his patron, and between himself and the poets of the past. As Khusrau tells one patron in a *qasīda*:

Even though I am the nightingale of words in the world's
rose garden,
I flit about in this garden on the branch of your fortune.

Don't forget me where your kindness goes hunting,
for crows and ravens eat the leftovers of royal falcons.

Such poems employed an elevated and dignified diction and a wide and often learned vocabulary. Though clearly hyperbolic, they were often infused with genuine feeling, for the bond between patron and poet was sometimes very strong and, as mentioned before, poets at court often had the additional role of boon companion. Khusrau also wrote many *qasīdas* in praise of Nizāmuddīn Auliya that are similarly solemn in tone but which draw on the mystical register of language. Poets normally used a highly metaphorical language to describe their patrons in panegyric poems.

But Khusrau is better known today for his lyric poetry, in the form of the *ghazal*, which had become the most popular literary genre in Persian by the time he was writing; its diction is simpler than that of the *qasīda* and its main subject matter, love, more universal in its appeal. The setting of a *ghazal* could be either the ruler's court or the Sufi cloister, and the object of desire either an earthly beauty or the sacred divine. The difficulty of categorizing Khusrau's *ghazals* as either amatory or mystical is all the greater since he was active in courtly and Sufi circles at once, and the ethos of courtly love that informs his poetry can conventionally be read as an allegory of longing for the divine. This ethos will be recognizable to readers who are familiar with the European sonnet tradition: the lowly lover humbles himself as a slave, an exile, or a beggar before a beautiful, unattainable, and cruel beloved; union and fulfilment can only be imagined and suffering is inevitably the lover's lot. In the *ghazal*, this love generally has a homoerotic dimension, since the beloved is often a young boy, a literary convention in early Persian *ghazals* which derived their context from courtly banquets where pageboys and *sāqīs* were present, or Sufi circles where handsome, beardless boys (*shāhids*) were considered a witness to divine beauty. The device of using a female voice to express longing for a lover is characteristic of Indic poetry and Khusrau used it expertly in his Hindavi poems,

where grammatical gender allows the poet to adopt personas of either sex. In contrast, this remains a moot point in his *ghazals* since Persian has no grammatical gender and the beauty of the work, to some extent, relies on sexual ambiguity. To suggest this ambiguity in English, with its mandatory distinction between 'he' and 'she', we have used both pronouns to represent the poet's object of desire, the elusive other without whom the lover cannot be complete.

Although the poet in the *ghazal* usually speaks in the voice of the yearning, heart-sick lover, this voice is at times tinged with teasing and even lascivious banter (poems 23 or 37), or even outright reproach (poem 43). The lover on occasion even imagines or remembers rare moments of fulfilment (poems 5 or 14). On still other occasions, we hear the voice of an older man who chides himself for still being addicted to wine and boys, symbols for earthly snares that distract one from the mystical path (poems 8 or 35). This voice is closely related to the homiletic voice of the sage, who warns against the snares, deceptions, and unfaithfulness of the world or earthly existence (poems 22 or 25). Our selection of *ghazals* contains representatives of all these voices.

Another feature of the *ghazal* that is regularly found in Amīr Khusrau's poems is the Sufi habit of taking an irreverent attitude towards the outer trappings of Islam, which results in blasphemous utterances. Only the poet/lover who thwarts the rules of society and religion and in the process becomes an infidel, i.e., Hindu in the Indian context and Christian or Zoroastrian in the Iranian, is able to traverse the true path of love. By drinking wine and dallying with young lads, he breaks societal and religious norms, as represented by narrow-minded practitioners of religion such as the muezzin and holy warrior (*ghāzī*). The fact that many of his poems have Sufi overtones does not necessarily mean that all his lyrics should be viewed as mystical. Sufi terminology and imagery had permeated lyric poetry to such an extent that sharp distinctions between secular and mystical poetry were no longer

valid. As a literary craftsman, Amīr Khusrau was well aware of his predecessors and consciously imitated them. His main predecessors in the genre of the *ghazal* were Sa'dī, who did not write mystical *ghazals*, and 'Irāqī, whose verses are entirely Sufi. Khusrau's own poems draw from both types. The fact that some of his poems are part of the practice of Sufism today does render them mystical in the context of performance, but this may not have been their original context or intent. Precisely what criteria played a role in a poem being performed in a mystical setting is not an easy question to answer. Basically any *ghazal* of Amīr Khusrau can be considered mystical depending on the context in which it is sung. The poet may consciously have written some *ghazals* exclusively for use in Sufi gatherings at Nizāmuddīn Auliya's *khānaqāh* (for example, poems 18 or 30), and others that were meant for a courtly audience; but many were bound to be used in both contexts based on their appeal for contemporary audiences.

The popularity of Urdu *ghazals* today among South Asians around the world provides an example of the viability and universal appeal of this poetic form from the time of Khusrau. Although the Urdu *ghazal* ultimately has roots in the Indo-Persian lyric of a few centuries after Khusrau, he played a central part in popularizing the form and establishing its aesthetic parameters. Khusrau sometimes combined in a subtle manner the Persian and Indic poetic traditions with which he was familiar. The first poem in his *divān* is one of the most brilliant and popular of his *ghazals*. The poem is reminiscent of a genre of Indian folk song where the beloved pines for her lover in the monsoon season, but here the poet has cleverly included the cloud as a participant in the drama of the lovers. Although the speaker/lover laments his imminent separation from the cruel beloved, he ends by declaring that the beloved, and not he, will be harmed by this separation.

A look at the Persian text of the opening line of this poem suggests some of the daunting difficulties faced in recreating Persian

poetry and, in particular, the notoriously ‘untranslatable’ *ghazal* in English:

abr mibārad u man mīshavam az yār judā
chun kunam dil bi-chunīn rūz zi dildār judā.

This verse exhibits the rhyme between half-verses—between ‘*yār*’ and ‘*dildār*’—that characterizes the opening line of any *ghazal*; the following verses are similarly divided into two, but rhyme only at the end of the second half of the verse. A refrain-word (*radīf*)—‘*judā*’—follows each rhyming syllable. Due to differences in phonetic structure, English is rhyme-poor compared to Persian, and maintaining the mono-rhyme over all nine verses in English would inevitably sound forced and lead to unacceptable distortions in meaning and imagery. We have, however, tried to maintain the effect of the refrain by using words with the syllable ‘part’ in each stanza of our translation. Ranging between twenty-four and thirty-two syllables, the Persian *ghazal* verse is far longer than any conventional verse form in English, and each Persian verse is in many ways a self-standing unit in syntax and imagery. Often only a few verses from a poem would be selected for inclusion in a musical performance or anthology. In English poetics, the closest analogy to the Persian verse seems to be the stanza, and our translations frequently use short stanzas to represent each verse. Syntax and imagery can unfold in many different ways within the long Persian verse, and in the translation of poem 1, the stanzas have been shaped to reflect this. (In other *ghazals*, stanzas of two to five lines are used consistently throughout a poem.) Since each verse is self-contained in grammar and imagery, the connections between verses is often much looser than we are accustomed to in other literary forms. But in poem 1, as in many of Khusrau’s other *ghazals*, there is clear coherence of mood, setting, imagery, and tone throughout the poem. To convey the development of thought and mood between verses and over the course of the poem, we have sometimes combined consecutive verses

into stanzas. Read together, the variety in the visual, metrical, and conceptual segmentation of the poems is meant to represent the aural variety of the varying rhymes and metres in Persian.

Poem 1 also contains two conventional images that Khusrau returns to repeatedly and with particular intensity. First is the image complex of tears, weeping, and the gaze: ‘Cracks breach my eyes weeping for you.’ In the most concrete, physical terms, this image refers to the blood-red capillaries that appear in people’s eyes when they cry. But as the reiterated image of ‘bloody tears’ suggests, this physical phenomenon takes on a deep symbolic resonance. Tears are imagined to well up from the heart and, like the poem itself, to be the outward sign of the speaker’s inner turmoil and suffering. Conversely, the reflected image of the beloved in the speaker’s eyes is a visible mark of the impact which the beloved has on the poet’s mind and emotions. The gaze of the beloved is a weapon, an arrow that pierces the core of the lover’s being. Second is the image of the beloved’s hair. As in poem 1, the tresses of the beloved are often likened to chains. Their curling strands and ‘locks’ represent the dark, captivating force of desire which threatens to dismember the speaker’s personality and plunge him into a swirling abyss of passion. A strand of hair is also used to cast black-magic spells of possession. These two images are the subject of an almost endless play of metaphor and trope in Khusrau’s poetry, and embody the speaker’s psychology of yearning.

In the centuries after he lived, selections of Amīr Khusrau’s lyrics were included in innumerable anthologies, engraved on objects, or used to display the art of calligraphy, indicating not only his prodigious output but also the universality of his appeal. Khusrau’s *ghazals* have had a great impact on later poets, including the master poet of this genre—Hāfiz of Shiraz. The *ghazals* also have a continuous oral tradition to this day, especially in Central and South Asia, even though Persian is no longer widely understood in the latter region. Even in the fifteenth century it was difficult to collect all the writings of Khusrau. From the vast corpus of Persian *ghazals*

authored by Amīr Khusrau—1,981 in the Lahore edition used in our translations—the few that are performed today probably have long been popular in an oral setting. It is also to be expected that in an environment where orality was the privileged form of disseminating a text, there would be some degree of misattribution or confusion, as in the case of this couplet:

Every community has its own path of religion and place
of prayer.

I have set my *qibla* in the direction of the one with his
cap awry.

In a mystical interpretation of this verse, the young boy with his cap awry is read as the divine beloved or his earthly representative. The context of this verse is thought to be an exchange between Nizāmuddīn Auliya, to whom the first line is attributed, and Khusrau, who replied with the second. However, the entire *ghazal* is found in Hasan's *divān*. The misattribution persists because these three individuals were so inextricably linked, a blurring of identities that only increased over time. The Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–16) narrates in his memoirs, *Tuzūk-i Jahāngīri*, that during a *qawwālī* session at court when this line was being performed, a courtier passed away while trying to explain the subtleties of its meaning!

By Amīr Khusrau's time, the works of several major poets were coming to be recognized as the core of the classical Persian canon. Sa'dī has already been mentioned as a master poet of love lyrics and didactic literature who was greatly admired by all Persian poets, but two other poets may have had an even greater impact on the tradition: Firdausī with his Iranian epic, *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings), and Nizāmī with his quintet (*khamṣa*) of narrative poems. Both poets composed heroic or romantic tales in the *masnavī* form (a narrative or discursive poem in rhymed couplets) whose topics were morality, kingship and courtly love. They had a universal

appeal in the Persianate world, and the *Shāhnāma*, dealing with pre-Islamic kings of Iran, was especially popular in royal courts because it espoused ideals of kingship and ethical behaviour. Nizāmī's influence on poets who wrote long narrative tales was just as extensive, and innumerable poets imitated his *khamṣa* over the centuries. If Firdausī's *Shāhnāma* was a source of political legitimacy, Nizāmī's *khamṣa* was one of cultural prestige. The five works in the *khamṣa* contained all the elements that were part and parcel of the Persian literary universe: Iranian and Arab romantic legends, the pre-Islamic Greek and Iranian historical past, didactic and philosophical discourses, all of which came to be accepted as the epitome of the civilization's cultural achievement.

Amīr Khusrau was the first poet who set out to match Nizāmī's achievements, not to outdo him but rather to measure up to his standard by producing works that would be more relevant to his own milieu. No one has surpassed Nizāmī in the beauty of his language and the subtlety of his thoughts. Khusrau's strengths lay in his fast-paced narrative and light-heartedness, and his fondness for wordplay and double entendre. In these poems, he was able to express himself fully as a storyteller. He himself compares his accomplishments to the great master at the conclusion of the *Hasht bihišt*:

If honey is useful,
vinegar too has its buyers.
If a pearl is expensive,
amber too has value.
This work is without blemish.
It has glitter, if not gold.

Elsewhere, with regard to the material he has to work with and knowing that he will be compared to his great predecessor, Khusrau playfully complains that Nizāmī had consumed the fine wine from the goblet of the subject matter of the stories, and left the dregs for the other poets.

As part of his quintet, Amīr Khusrau wrote his versions of Nizāmī's two most popular romances, *Shīrīn and Khusrau*, and *Majnūn and Lailā*. He inverted the order of the names of the lovers in the titles to distinguish his versions from those of Nizāmī, but did not change the basic plots of the stories, although there are a few new elements in the order of events and the portrayal of characters. The first story is set in the pre-Islamic Iranian past but is more legend than historical truth. It revolves around Shīrīn, an Armenian princess, and Khusrau Parvīz (r. 590–628), the namesake of our poet and a ruler of Iran belonging to the Sassanian dynasty. The two fall in love early on but are separated for a long time by Khusrau Parvīz's involvement in military campaigns and his short-lived marriages to Maryam, the Byzantine princess, and Shikar, a slave girl. In the meantime, Shīrīn becomes the object of an ardent love by Farhād, a sculptor and, in this version, the son of the emperor of China. Both Khusrau and Shīrīn have their respective rivals murdered and marry, but their union does not last long because Khusrau is killed by his son Shīrūya, who wants to marry his stepmother Shīrīn. Ultimately, Shīrīn commits suicide over Khusrau's grave on her wedding day.

The story of Qais and Lailā is set among the nomadic tribes of the deserts of Arabia. Khusrau gave his personal touch to this story by changing the chaste nature of Majnūn and Lailā's relationship to include physical contact and sexual desire. The two protagonists fall in love when they are children in school but society does not approve. Qais spends much of his time in the wilderness and becomes a madman (Majnūn), wasting away in his love and with animals as his companions. Lailā (or Lailī) is also pining for her lover; when she hears a false rumour about his death, she falls ill and dies. When she is being buried, Majnūn jumps into the grave and dies clutching the body of his beloved. Majnūn's behaviour is extreme in every respect and his character possesses all the qualities of a typical lover of *ghazal* poetry (see poem 12). The intensity of his passion transcends cultural boundaries and has immortalized

this story not just in the Middle East, but also in South Asia and beyond. In Sufi poetry, especially, the character of Majnūn is given a mystical spin, symbolizing martyrdom in the path of love.

On the model of Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma* (Book of Alexander), Khusrau versified the Alexander romance and his version is called the *Āīna-yi Iskandari* (The Alexandrine Mirror). In his version of the adventures of Alexander, Khusrau sought to take Alexander further than Nizāmī had done and portrays Alexander not so much as a prophet and philosopher but as an adventurer and a scientist. The work has a romantic interlude when Alexander weds Kanīfū, the Amazonian Turk whose father served the Chinese emperor, after he defeats her in a duel.

The other works in Nizāmī's quintet, the first and the last in the set, also contain themes of love. The *Makhzan al-asrār* (Treasury of Secrets) consists of twenty ethical and spiritual discourses followed by short anecdotes. Khusrau's version, *Matla' al-anvār* (Rising Place of Lights), includes a story that fits the cultural context of the poet: a pious Brahmin who is crawling towards his idol impresses a Muslim pilgrim with his devotion, and by example educates him about Islam. It was in his last work, which required the inclusion of new stories and action-filled narratives, that Khusrau was able to exercise his own literary preferences in choosing the material. Nizāmī's *Haft paikar* (Seven Beauties) is a collection of stories told to the Iranian king Bahrām Gūr by seven princesses associated with seven different colours, who represent the different climes of the world. In Khusrau's *Hasht bihisht* (Eight Paradises), which has one more tale than Nizāmī's work, the stories are longer, faster-paced than Nizāmī's, full of witty wordplay and with complex plots that involve love, magic and adventure. Khusrau altered Nizāmī's original story by having his female protagonist Dilārām become adept at all kinds of musical arts, instead of achieving physical prowess, to impress the king, Bahrām Gūr. The details in the tales show that the poet is certainly drawing on his Indian background by including stories that he would have heard orally. One of these

stories seems to have its source in the *Tūtīnāma* and another, 'The Tale of the Camphor Princess', translated here as poem 80, has elements from the Sohni–Mahivāl legend of the Indus region, but is devoid of any mystical content. In his verse romances, Khusrau often sacrifices aesthetics for the sake of narrative, and our verse translation attempts to convey the rapid movement of the tale without forcing rhyme and metre on individual lines.

The lovers in these stories remain the epitome of romantic love in Persianate literature to this day. On a broader level, the romances of Nizāmī and Amīr Khusrau explore the nature of love that is a source for the wisdom that leads to justice and universal harmony. Subsequent poets in the Persianate traditions not only imitated the two poets in retelling the stories but also translated or used them as models for local love stories in other related literary cultures such as Turkish and Urdu. Khusrau's versions vary in plot and stylistics from Nizāmī's. There is less emphasis on the development of characters than on the pacing and elaboration of the plot. For instance, in the story of Khusrau and Shīrīn, Amīr Khusrau gives a bigger role to Farhād, portraying him much like Majnūn, a passionate and devoted lover, and his character overshadows the others. Farhād also plays a crucial role in the signature verse at the end of many of Khusrau's *ghazals*, such as in poems 13 and 38. So though the poet's pen-name is the same as the king who wins Shīrīn's love, the poet identifies with the lovelorn artist Farhād, whose love for Shīrīn results in his death. Khusrau's *khamisa* was read and imitated by later poets as assiduously as Nizāmī's, and due to the rich content of its stories, was often illustrated. Poem 53 is in the *munāzara* (dialogue) form in which the two lovers—Khusrau the king and Farhād—vie for Shīrīn's love.

Amīr Khusrau wrote his *khamisa* as a tribute to Nizāmī and in order to establish his standing as a poet. Once he had completed it, he returned to something he had tried earlier: writing narrative poetry using actual events of his time as the plot. His purpose here was to achieve something that would distinguish him in Persian

literary history as an innovator rather than an imitator. At this time, the panegyric ode was losing ground not only to the *ghazal* but also to the narrative *masnavi*. Narrative poetry in Persian usually dealt with epic and romantic legends from the past that had relevance to concerns from the author's own times. Khusrau's personal engagement with the court and the political events of his times, by contrast, allowed him to present living history by casting current events as romantic or didactic fiction. He wrote five *masnavis*, one in the reign of each sultan that he served, all dealing with courtly life. None of them included any events of his own personal life or the world around Nizāmuddīn Auliya, although by dedicating each work to the latter he was bridging the gap between the royal court and the Sufi *khānaqāh*. Since they are neither purely historical nor wholly poetic, these romanticized historical narratives pose problems for both historians and literary critics. The truth is that each work stands on its own, and they are of uneven quality. But it is precisely the mixed nature of these works that make them a fascinating subject of study.

According to Khusrau, the third of these historical poems, '*Ashīqa* (Beloved)—also known by the titles '*Ishqīya* (Love Story) and *Duval Rānī Khizr Khān*—is the symbolic union of the two major Indian traditions that produced the rich culture whose history begins with the poet himself. The '*Ishqīya* was completed in 1315, more than a decade after Khusrau had written his *khamisa*. It is probably his best-known historical narrative poem and the one that has been most often illustrated. Since it would have been impossible to include a complete translation of this romance, we have included a mixed prose and verse rendition that conveys the essential story and suggests the style of its narration (poem 79). There was a popular tradition in pre-modern Persianate cultures of oral narrations that consisted of a prose summary, with choice original verses, of long epic tales. The recent translation of the Persian epic, *Shāhnāma*, by Dick Davis shows the appeal of such a prosimetrum style for modern readers and has been an inspiration

behind poem 79. This long narrative tale describes the love of Sultan 'Alāuddīn's son, the young prince Khizr Khān for the Hindu princess Devaldei (or Duval Rānī), who was the daughter of Raja Karan of Gujarat. Khizr Khān was a well-liked and admired prince who was also a disciple of Nizāmuddīn Auliya. For these reasons, Khusrau must have been personally close to him. After the conquest of Gujarat in 1297 by Ulugh Khān, Princess Devaldei was brought to Delhi and raised in the royal harem. In a fairy-tale-like turn of events, the young prince and princess fall in love, and despite the designs of the prince's mother to keep them apart they are united in marriage. This is the point where Khusrau had ended his romance, but the lovers had a tragic end when Khizr Khān was imprisoned, blinded and finally killed in the Gwalior fortress by his brother Mubārak Shāh in his bid for the throne. After the four years of this sultan's rule came to an end, Khusrau updated the narrative and concluded the tale on this sad note. Khusrau declares that he wanted to create an Indian love story to match the legendary tales of lovers such as Vis and Rāmīn, Vāmiq and Azrā, and Lailā and Majnūn. In laying out the background for the story, the poet gives a short history of the Islamic civilization in India which culminates in the union of the two lovers, symbolically representing the synthesis of the two major cultures of the time. Along with the narrative the work is interspersed with dialogues between the two lovers and didactic stories.

In keeping with his literary versatility and creativity, Amīr Khusrau also wrote some prose works that have not been as popular as his poetry, nor had much of an impact on Indo-Persian writers after him. Not every poet wrote prose, and prose was ranked much lower than poetry in the hierarchy of literary genres. Accordingly, we have not included translations of Khusrau's prose works in this collection.

But one of these works, the introduction to one of his collections of *ghazals* (*Dibācha-yi dīvān-i ghurraṭ-i kamāl*), not only provides a literary autobiography, our primary source of information on the poet's life, but also a treatise on poetics. In it, Khusrau presents the

two qualities that he most prized in poetry: *ravānī* (fluency) and *ihām* (double entendre or punning). *Ravānī* was prized by many medieval Persian poets who aimed at an easy yet elegant style. Khusrau says that the style of a great poet should be simple (not like that of preachers), free of errors and original. He describes the gradual development of his poetic temperament from the cold and dry formality of his early *ghazals* towards a water-like, gentle softness, ending in his later poems in a delicate, well-seasoned perfection that can even set fire to a heart that is cold and devoid of passion. We have aimed for similar fluency in our translations, presenting the flow of images and emotions in Khusrau's poetry as accurately and clearly as possible, offering a plainer, though, we hope, no less substantive fare than the original texts. The second desirable quality in poetry, *ihām*, is Khusrau's favourite rhetorical device. He says, '[My] talent has established *ihām* as clearer than a mirror, for in a mirror more than one image does not appear from an object. But this is a mirror that when you look into it, seven true and clear images will appear.' Khusrau's *ihām* is similar to Ezra Pound's concept of *logopoeia*, the multiple usages, connotations, ironies, and associations that a word acquires over history. For Pound, this aspect of poetic language is untranslatable, but we hope that our diverse selection of Khusrau's poetry—from various genres, in various languages—will help create in English a sense of how the poet manipulated the key terms and images in his poetic language.

Khusrau placed a high epistemological—as well as artistic—value on poetry. Comparing discursive learning with poetry, he writes, 'Knowledge remains veiled by the minutiae of facts, while poetry becomes well known due to the manipulation of facts.' He continues, 'Poetry is higher than wisdom and wisdom lies at the bottom of poetry. A poet can be called a wise man but a wise man cannot be called a poet. Magic is considered part of rhetoric but rhetoric is not magic. Therefore, a poet can be called a magician but a magician cannot be called a poet.' We are privileged to offer some tastes of this magical brew of wisdom and poetry to English readers, much of it for the first time.

6 *Ghazal 155: man u shab zindagānī-yi man
in ast*

The night and I—this is my life.
Sorrow and the heart—this is my joy.

I drink heart's blood all night
in her memory. This is my pale pink wine.

At night I bewail the insomnia
of absence. This is my cordial song.

I and dark nights in grief's corner—
this is where I secretly rejoice.

Her phantom closes my eyes to myself,
for this is my soulmate at night.

She shouldn't be distressed by my distress.
This is just what I suspected from my heart.

Sometimes I die for her love, sometimes
I live again—this is how my life goes.

Permit me to die at your feet,
for this is my eternal life.

Khusrau costs you no more than to say,
'This is the slave I got for free.'

7 *Ghazal 249: asarī namānd bāqī az man andar
ārzūyat*

Yearning for you, no trace of me remains.
What shall I do, for no one gets his fill
of gazing upon your beautiful cheek.
All day in your street, all night at your door,
I have no goal but to look at your face.
I will now circumambulate your street
with just my eyes, for my legs are worn down
to the knees in searching for you.

By faith, will you accept that tracking down
your fidelity, I fed my blood-soaked
heart to the dogs on your street? My mind,
my reason, my senses, heart and eyes too
are devoid of any image but the image
of your face. No, I cannot rightly render
service to you short of yielding
my sweet life in yearning for you.

Which garden do you come from that your scent
is so sweet, my Rose? Your breeze enlarges
the soul, and the dead heart is brought to life.
Though you load my body, weak as a hair,

with a universe of woe, I'll not trade
a single strand of your hair for both worlds.
What need to explain to you how I am,
now that Khusrau has become a legend
in yearning and searching for you?

8 *Ghazal 257: muflisī az pādshā'ī khushtar ast*

Poverty is more pleasant than majesty;
depravity, more pleasant than piety.
Majesty has its headaches, and when
last I looked, beggary was more pleasant.
Since kings let no one approach them,
being indigent among the poor
is more pleasant.

When pride gets into someone's head,
being pals with a dog from the streets
is more pleasant.

When the heart breaks with melancholy
over some beauty, that breaking is more pleasant
than any salve. Public love play with idols
is more pleasant than all this devout hypocrisy.
Once won, there's no pleasure in love.
Separation, for those who play this game,
is more pleasant.

Put your base love out of your mind,
Khusrau. Love for the sacred secret
is more pleasant.

12 *Ghazal 379: khum tuhī gasht u hanūz-am
jān az may sīrāb nīst*

The vat is empty,
and my heart is still not sated with wine.
If finer vintages are exhausted,
O heart of mine,
your blood has been kept in reserve.
The clanking of Majnūn's chains is organ
music for lovers, a music
the prudent don't have the ear to taste.

Wheeling fates,
don't bother. I have enemies
enough to love me: no need for the butcher
where the executioner stands ready.
Tell the king, 'Make his blood run!'
Tell the authorities, 'Off with his head!'
To abandon the beloved for the sake
of one's life is no part of the lovers' creed.

Look out.
If you have any sense, beware!
Take no pity on me: madness
is the best thing to pack for this path.
If the beloved's beauty is not in sight,
its phantom can still make me happy.
In poor homes, moonlight makes the best candle.

Homicidal hunter!
Infidel!
Be gentle a while.
The helpless gazelle cannot contend
with barbarian arrows. Why does that heart,
no longer mine,
circle around you so? Are no
impatient arrows left in your quiver?
Sometimes in my dreams, you said
you would show me your face.
Tell it to a stranger.
One who knows you never sleeps.

Heart,
you will die thirsty.
Turn away from that dimple.
If you dig any deeper in that well,
blood will come to the surface:
No water to be had there.

Khusrau,
first tie on the infidel's sash,
then bow down in adoration.
That eyebrow is a temple for idols:
No prayer niche to be found there.

Music thus requires both voice and melody,
poetry needs a only a connoisseur of words.
Poetry is the bride and song her ornament, but
is there any harm if a beautiful bride has none?
One who knows this I consider to be human, if not
he should ask me, but if he doesn't he is an ass.'

52 *The Fine Lads of Delhi*

*This ghazal is from the poet's larger narrative poem (masnavī),
Qirān al-sa'dain (The Conjunction of Two Auspicious Stars),
which includes praises of Delhi's buildings and inhabitants.*

Delhi and its fine lads
with their turbans and twisted beards
openly drinking lovers' blood
while secretly sipping wine.

Wilful and full of airs
they pay no heed to anyone.

So close to the heart, they rob
your soul and tuck it safely away.

When they are out for a stroll
rose bushes bloom in the street.

When the breeze strikes them from behind,
see how the turbans topple from their heads.

When they walk, the lovers follow,
blood gushing from their eyes.

Their heads puffed up with beauty's pride,
their admirers' hearts are gone with the wind.

These cheeky, simple Indian lads have made
Muslims into worshippers of the sun.

Those fair Hindu boys
have led me to drunken ruin.
Trapped in the coils of their curly locks
Khusrau is a dog on a leash.

53 *Exchange between Two Lovers:
Khusrau and Farhād*

This selection is from the long narrative poem, Shīrīn and Khusrau. Rivals for the affections of the fair Shīrīn, Khusrau and Farhād embody two kinds of lovers. The form of a verse dialogue (munāzara) between two characters was often used effectively by Nizāmī.

Morning arose from long sweet slumber
clutching a goblet of milk in her hand.
Her distant movement roused heaven
and the goblet's sweetness spilled over.

King Khusrau said, 'My fortune seems bright;
I will go to visit the river of milk today.'

He removed his kingly garments
and emerged in a shepherd's guise.
Making inquiries through dale and hill,
he came alone to the river of milk.
He gazed for a while on the bank of the stream
and saw all the rocks piled up in a heap.
He looked carefully at each cut
with an expert eye and called out, 'Bravo'.

When he saw the master craftsmanship,
he set off towards the master, designing a scheme.